

MEDÆVAL ORNAMENT.

In the capitals of the columns in the Early English architecture the ornament arises directly from the shaft, which above the necking splits up into a series of stems, each stem terminating in a flower. This is analogous to the mode of decorating the Egyptian capital. In the Decorated style, on the contrary, where a much nearer approach to Nature was attempted, it was no longer possible to treat a natural leaf as part of the shaft; and, therefore, the shaft is terminated by a bell-shape,



Stone Church, Kent. Published by the Topographical Society.

round which the leaves are twined. The more and more natural these were made, the less artistic became the arrangement.

The same thing occurs in the bosses which cover the intersection of the ribs. On the vaulting; in the Early English bosses the stems of the flowers forming the bosses are continuations of the mouldings of the ribs, whilst in subsequent periods the intersections of the ribs were concealed by the overlaying of the boss, which was here as much an application as was the acanthus leaf to the bell of the Corinthian capital.

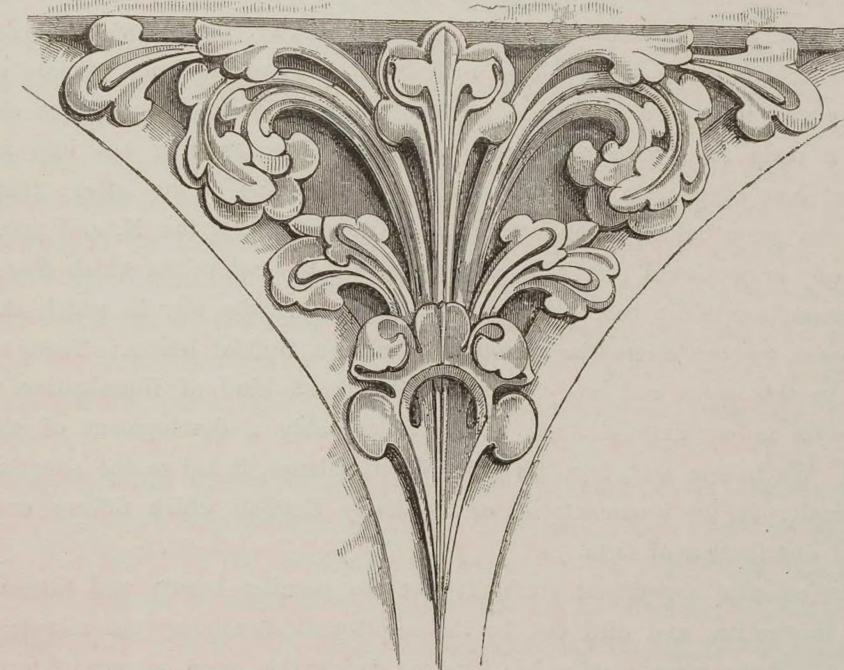
In the spandrels of the arches, so long as the conventional style was retained, one vigorous main stem was distributed over the spandril, from which sprang the leaves and flowers; but when the natural was attempted, the stem ceased to be the guiding form of the ornament, and lost all grace in the endeavour to represent in stone the softness of nature. The main stem as a leading feature gradually disappears, and the spandrels are often filled with three immense leaves springing from a twisted stem in the centre.

From the few remains which still exist of the decorations of the interior of buildings, we are unable to form a very complete idea of this class of ornament of the thirteenth century. The ornaments from illuminated MSS. are not a safe guide, as, after the twelfth century, the style is rarely very architectural, and there were so many schools of illumination, and they borrowed so much one from the other, that there is often great mixture in the same illumination. It is unlikely, that while the sculptured ornament was so universally conventional, that the decorated portion of the same building could have departed from the style.

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On Plates LXVII. and LXVII*, we give a selection of borders found on illuminated MSS., ranging from the ninth to the fourteenth century; and on Plate LXVIII. diapers from walls, chiefly taken from the back-grounds of illuminations, from the twelfth to the sixteenth. There are very few of either class that could be worthy accompaniments to the pure conventional ornament of the Early English style.

In the thirteenth century, beyond all others, architecture was in its zenith. The mosques of Cairo, the Alhambra, Salisbury, Lincoln, Westminster, all possess the same secret of producing the broadest



Wells Cathedral. COLLINS.

general effects combined with the most elaborate decoration. In all these buildings there is a family likeness; although the forms widely differ, the principles on which they are based are the same. They exhibit the same care for the leading masses of the composition, the same appreciation of the undulations of form, the same correct observation of natural principles in the ornamentation, the same elegance and refinement in all the decoration.

The attempt to reproduce in our time a building of the thirteenth century must be vain indeed. Whitewashed walls, with stained glass and encaustic tiles, cannot alone sustain the effect which was arrived at when every moulding had its colour best adapted to develope its form, and when, from the floor to the roof, not an inch of space but had its appropriate ornament, an effect which must have been glorious beyond conception. So glorious a point, indeed, had the style reached that it was exhausted by the effort,—the light burnt out; not only architecture, but all the decorative arts which accompanied it, immediately began to decline,—a decline which never stops till the style dies out.

In the examples of encaustic tiles on Plate LXX. it will be seen that the broadest in effect, and the best adapted to their purpose, are the earliest, such as Nos. 17, 27. Although there was never so much decline as to attempt an appearance of relief, yet a near approach to a representation of the natural forms of leaves may be seen in No. 16; and a very marked decline is observed in patterns such as No. 23, where tracery and the structural features of buildings were represented.